

# CARBON MONOXIDE GAS

## What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, tasteless, and dangerous gas. It is lighter than air and can quickly spread throughout an entire house.

## Why is it dangerous?

CO poisoning results in a lack of oxygen to cells in the body. The cells in the brain and heart require large amounts of oxygen and quickly suffer from any oxygen shortage. This makes even small amounts of CO dangerous. Damage may be irreversible and death may occur. Infants and children are at greater risk for CO poisoning than adults because of their increased metabolism.

## What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

Symptoms of poisoning are flu-like and can include: headache, fatigue (tired), nausea (upset stomach), dizziness, weakness, confusion, and irritability. Continued exposure can lead to vomiting, loss of consciousness, brain damage, irregular heart beat, breathing difficulties, muscle weakness, and death.

## I'm pregnant, is my unborn baby at risk?

Yes! CO attaches at a higher concentration to the hemoglobin in an unborn baby's blood than in it's mother's blood. Because of this the unborn baby is at an even higher risk for death than the pregnant woman.

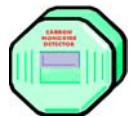
## Where does CO come from?



Everything that burns produces some CO. Most homes have one or more appliances that burn fuel: furnaces, gas stoves, water heaters, gas dryers, fireplaces, and space heaters that burn gas or oil. Chimneys may become plugged with bird nests and block CO in the home. Gas appliances may "leak" CO gas if not properly maintained. Cars are another potential source. When the garage is attached to the house the CO from a car's engine may move into the home.

## What can I do?

- ☐ Install a CO detector with an alarm and an Underwriters Laboratory (UL) seal. Maintain your detector as the manufacturer requires. Detectors should be located near each sleeping area. If the home has separated sleeping areas, more than one detector should be installed.
- ☐ Have all heating appliances checked every year by a qualified service person. This includes gas ranges.
- ☐ Do not operate any unvented gas or oil powered (space) heaters, appliances, or power equipment in the house.
- ☐ Do not idle (start and leave in park) your car in an attached garage. Always drive the car out of the garage after starting the engine and always turn the engine off as soon as you drive into the garage.
- ☐ If you are replacing a furnace or water heater, select direct-vent sealed combustion units.



## What should I do if the alarm on my CO detector activates?

Follow the instructions provided with the alarm. If you feel any symptoms that may be related to CO poisoning, leave the house and call 911. If you don't feel any symptoms, ventilate the house, reset the detector according to it's instructions, turn off potential sources of CO, and have the home checked by a qualified heating and ventilating service contractor. The best initial treatment for CO gas exposure is fresh air.

## Who can I contact for more information?

More information on CO gas and it's health effects can be obtained by calling the **Children's Environmental Health Program** at (402) 441-8000.

Sources: University of Wisconsin, United States Department of Agriculture, and Wisconsin Counties Cooperating.